



Africa as a peace mediator between Ukraine and Russia?

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Jean-Yves Ollivier (left) and Amama Mbabazi. Fabien Clairefond

OP-ED - While several African heads of state are due to travel to Kiev and Moscow, Jean-Yves Ollivier, Founding Chairman of the Brazzaville Foundation* and Amama Mbabazi, former Prime Minister of Uganda, discuss the role the continent can play in finding a way out of the conflict.

This is not yet the road to peace, but an African path is opening up in the hope of leading there: today and tomorrow, a delegation from the Brazzaville Foundation is in Kyiv for talks, at their invitation, with the Ukrainian authorities. This approach is the counterpart of a previous visit to Moscow. The aim is to initiate “talks about talks” – preliminary discussions about future peace talks - following a good offices mission, scheduled for March, by several African heads of state, who should go successively to Moscow then Kyiv. This is only a first step. But a timid air of peace seeks to pierce the clash of arms.

The Brazzaville Foundation, which is at the service of Africa for peace, the environment and public health, is the facilitator of this initiative, discreetly carried out for months at several levels. Last June, the President of Senegal, Macky Sall, who is also the current chairman of the African Union (AU), traveled to Sochi, on the Black Sea, to meet Vladimir Putin there. Then, we followed up on his approach – sometimes misinterpreted in the West – in Moscow. This was not an act of complacency, let alone bias. On the contrary. Africa, which is no longer the "pawn" of anyone, asserts its impartiality for reasons of its own.

The good cause of peace

First, the poorest continent is suffering more than any other part of the world from the fallout from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, from soaring energy prices to the disruption of its vital grain and fertilizer supplies to sanctions aimed at isolating one of its major trading partners. Next, Africa — because of its bad historical experience — is extremely sensitive to respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is precisely why she remembers numerous precedents that belie the imperative Manichaeism of the “choose one side to prove her good faith”. One example among many others: which camp should have been joined when the West intervened in 2011, quite cavalierly, to overthrow Colonel Gaddafi, without concern for the future of Libya and the destabilization of the entire Sahel region whose effects are felt, dramatically, until today? Wouldn't it be better to defend the good cause of peace instead of rallying to the "right" camp?

This is the meaning of the approach which, today, advances by one square. Africa, concerned about the peace that has so often been disturbed at home, wants to facilitate a resumption of speech between Moscow and Kyiv. From the Ukrainian capital, we will travel to Addis Ababa to report on our mission to African heads of state gathered in the Ethiopian capital for the annual AU summit meeting, February 18-19. It is then that the composition of the good office mission - six or seven heads of state representative of the continent and the diversity of its points of view - will be definitively decided. The rest will be determined, as it should be, between Moscow and Kyiv. Africa, in the past more often than in turn the “object” of mediations, seeks nothing other than to serve the cause of peace. Independently and in good faith.

*The Brazzaville Foundation is a civil society organisation promoting and supporting African initiatives to give them a concrete and sustainable impact.

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